

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, 859 5th St., Hancock, MN 56244

www.hancocklutheran.org

Pastor Gregg Bitter (320) 392-5313 - GreggBitter@gmail.com

Epiphany 3c

January 27, 2013

As Christ's Members, We Care for Each Other

1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26, 27

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The word from God through which the Holy Spirit connects us to Jesus is 1 Corinthians 12

For just as the body is one and has many parts, yet all the parts of the body (although they are many) are one body, so also Christ. For by one Spirit all of us were baptized to be one body, whether we were Jews or Greeks, whether slave or free. And all of us were given one Spirit to drink.

For the body is not one part but many. If the foot would say, "Since I'm not a hand, I'm not part of the body," it wouldn't for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Since I'm not an eye, I'm not part of the body," it wouldn't for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body was an eye, where would the hearing be? If there was only hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them in the body just as he wanted. If all of them were one member, where would the body be?

Now the eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you." Or again, the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." If one part suffers, all the members suffer together. If one member is glorified, all the members rejoice together.

Now you are the body of Christ and members according to your part. (1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26, 27).

This is the word of our Lord.

Dear friends in Christ, fellow saints washed clean in the blood of our risen Savior:

"I follow Paul. He brought us the Gospel." "No, I follow Apollos. Didn't you see how the Gospel grew while he was here preaching?" "None of them were with Jesus during his life on earth. So I follow Peter." "Why follow mere men? I follow Christ."

That's what was happening at the church in Corinth. Members were puffing themselves up claiming to follow a greater teacher than others followed. But none of them, even those who claimed to follow Christ, were truly listening. If each of them had taken to heart the Gospel proclaimed by these men, there would not have been divisions and factions among them. Rather they would all have been united in mind and thought as the Good News of Jesus filled them and controlled their heart, mind, and will. For each of those preachers listed were faithful teachers of the Word.

So in this letter the Apostle Paul brings them that saving word once again. He proclaims Christ crucified -- not a Savior who puffs himself up but who humbled himself to bear our sin, who humbled himself even to death on the cross to serve as our ransom, the only sacrifice that pays for sin. Christ -- the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Now in chapter twelve as the Apostle talks about spiritual gifts, he again reminds the Corinthians and us of the unity we have as members of Christ. Christians have different gifts, talents, abilities, roles, positions, and functions. But these differences ought not divide the body but rather work together to take care of the body.

How can you properly use the gifts, talents, abilities, roles, positions, and functions God has given you? Consider that question as we ponder the words the Holy Spirit gave the Apostle to write, picturing the body of Christ and you as its different parts or members. Guided by these words of the Spirit, we focus on the theme: As Christ's members we care for each other. We do that united in Christ by Baptism -- part one. And we do that serving one another as God has arranged -- part two.

A. United in Christ by Baptism

The Apostle writes, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12 NIV84). Each of our bodies has many different parts or members: eyes, ears, mouth, nose, hands, feet, fingers, toes, and many others. But all of them are one body, united. So also Christ.

Notice where the Apostle directs our attention. He does not write, "So also the Church." That certainly would be true and Biblical. The Church is the body, and we are the members. In fact, "Church" is the word I would've expected here. But the Holy Spirit says so much more, when he says, "Christ."

Many members. One body. So also Christ. For you see, dear Christian friends, we are not only united together as members of the community of believers, the Church of God. We are united together as members of Christ himself. He in us and we in him. He is the body; we are his members -- so close our union with Jesus!

How did this miraculous union come about? The Apostle tells us, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body -- whether Jew or Greek, slave or free -- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Corinthians 12:13 NIV84). Through the water and word of Baptism you were given the Holy Spirit to drink. For to drink the Spirit is to drink the living water, that is, to believe the Spirit's testimony that points us to Christ, who is our life. It doesn't matter what you were before: Jew or Greek, slave or free, rich or poor, young or old. Whatever our culture, background, class, or status, through Baptism the Holy Spirit brought you and me to be members of Christ, united as different parts of the one body. "We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13 NIV84).

Do you, dear friend, struggle at times, wondering whether you are truly part of Christ's body, one of his members united in him? Do you wonder whether the Holy Spirit truly lives in you?

Look back to your Baptism. Do you believe the promises God made to you through the water and word? In Baptism, the Holy Spirit gave you rebirth into God the Father's family. You, who were a slave to Satan and headed for hell, were reborn as a child of God and heir of heaven. In Baptism, the Holy Spirit washed away your sins with the blood of the God the Son, making you brand new. You were clothed with Christ, and Christ himself presented to his Father as his glorious bride, pure, blameless, and holy. In

Baptism, the Holy Spirit made you, who were dead in sin, spiritually alive through faith in Jesus Christ. Believe the Spirit's promises made to you when you were baptized with water. Through these promises the Holy Spirit lives in you so that you are a member of Christ's body, as long as you continue in your faith firmly clinging to his promises proclaimed to you in the water and word of Baptism. Yes, you are united to Christ by Baptism.

So as you use the gifts, abilities, talents, roles, positions, and functions God has given you, remember your Baptism. Remember that you are united in Christ. Through faith you are members of one body, Christ's body. How that affects all that we do! As Christ's members, we care for each other. We serve each other as God enables us, which brings us to part two.

B. Serving one another as God has arranged

The Apostle writes, "Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body" (1 Corinthians 12:14-16 NIV84).

Dear Christian friends, guard against that false humility. We see the gifts another Christian has or the position their given and feel that, since we can't do what they do, we're not of much use. It sounds quite humble, but it's just an excuse. It's not god-pleasing. Think about when the Lord called Moses at the burning bush to lead Israel out of Egypt. Moses excuses first sound quite humble: "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh" (Exodus 3:12 NIV84)? "What if they do not believe me" (Exodus 4:1 NIV84)? "I can't speak well" (paraphrase of Exodus 4:10). "Just send someone else. I'm not up to it" (paraphrase of Exodus 4:13). The Lord became angry with such excuses not to serve. Guard against false humility.

For you see, dear Christian friends, the Lord himself has placed you in the body of Christ. He has arranged each of us in his wisdom, blessing us with different gifts, abilities, and talents and giving us different positions, roles, and functions. Don't think you're useless, for he has a use for you. Don't think you have no service to give, for he himself has blessed you. If we're going to work together as the body of Christ, we need the different abilities and talents, the different roles and positions God has arranged for each of us. "If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be" (1 Corinthians 12:17, 18 NIV84). There's no useless Christian. God knows what he is doing.

Likewise, dear friends, don't look down on a fellow Christian whose abilities may not match yours or whose position may seem insignificant. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'" (1 Corinthians 12:21 NIV84). We need each other.

So how are we to use our gifts? First of all, remember that God has arranged the parts of the body. He's the one who has given you your abilities, talents, and skills. Whether you were born with them or acquired them through study and hard work, either

way they are gifts -- gracious, undeserved, unmerited gifts -- from your God. Likewise, no matter how high or low your position or role in life appears to be, remember that God has arranged the parts of the body. He gives us different roles and positions whether that is as husband or wife, parent or child, worker or employer, teacher or student, pastor or parishioner. He's arranged the members of the body with their different functions for the good of one another. Remembering that this all comes from God keeps us from false humility, since we have divine gifts, and also false pride, since these are gracious, undeserved gifts.

Secondly these are all spiritual gifts when we use them to take care of the body of Christ. Yes, the Holy Spirit can give supernatural gifts but he can also take natural gifts and sanctify them for God's use. Both are wonderful miracles of the Holy Spirit.

So use your different abilities and talents, your different roles and positions to care for the body of Christ. When there is hurt or sadness, sympathize, comfort, encourage, and help. This certainly includes helping with physical needs but goes beyond that as well. For true comfort and encouragement come in Christ. He is our Hope. His word brings patient endurance, for he has conquered sin and death for us. When there is honor and joy, rejoice together around the cross, boasting in Christ and him crucified, declaring the glory of our Savior slain.

“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ and each of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:26, 27). As Christ's members, united in him by Baptism, care for each other. For you are the body of Christ and the Holy Spirit give you the gifts you need to serve the body, as God has arranged it. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.